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ABSTRACT

Specific competencies that practicing sociologists and sociologists in academic settings believe are most needed to prepare students for non-academic careers were identified. A total of 504 questionnaires were sent randomly to members of 5 sub-groups of non-academic and academic sociologists. The response rate was 65.8 percent (315 usable returns). Participants were given a list of specific functional competencies and personal attributes and asked to indicate the relative need of each competency area. In this report the ratings from the respondents are ranked by the mean scores for each competency. Responses to open-ended questions also included in the questionnaire are summarized. Among the most needed competencies are the ability to clearly conceptualize realistic problems and the ability to communicate effectively in work situations. Skills in writing manuals and reports were also identified as important. The personal attributes considered most important include the ability to write concisely, competency in organizing thoughts and information, and effective listening skills. In their open-ended comments, sociologists expressed the need for more experiential student opportunities, for better communication skills, and for some knowledge of other disciplines. (RM)

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Section on Undergraduate Education

Panel Presentation:

"AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING APPLIED SOCIOLOGY"

by

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"AN ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING APPLIED SOCIOLOGY"

Introduction

Applied sociology as a major focus within the fabric of sociology is like the new kid on the block—even though it has existed for decades without a recognized title. There has been a great deal of attention given toward establishing a turf for applied sociology in recent years. Perhaps the single most important event that served as a catalyst for the emergence of applied sociology as a separate (although not distinct) entity within the discipline was the 1981 Washington, D. C., "Workshop on Directions in applied sociology" However, the majority of the effort to promote applied sociology has focused on applied sociology as social research and policy analysis.

An area of considerable neglect in the rapidly emerging fields of applied sociology and clinical sociology has been the exploration of career opportunities for our majors other than those related primarily to research. In what careers could applied sociologists compete in the market place beside time honored research fields???

To investigate this question, it is useful to identify specific competencies that practicing sociologists as well as sociologists in academic settings believe are most needed to prepare students for non-academic careers. In other words, what kinds of skills could or should students asquire in order to enhance their ability to sell themselves to non-academic employers....in addition to their research competencies. This paper provides some insight into this important question.

Methodology

After sending "Alert" cards, five hundred and four questionnaires were sent randomly to members of five subgroups of non-academic and academic sociologists. The question items were generated via search of the literature and interviews with employers in Central Florida as well as with sociologists in academic and non-academic settings. Sampling frames were obtained for members of the Section on Sociological Practice of the American Sociological Association, the Clinical Sociology Association, and the Society for Applied Sociology. Questionnaires were also sent to a sample of colleges and universities which have graduate programs in applied sociology in the U.S. Lastly, a sample of "ASA Members Willing to Discuss Their Work With Others" was sent questionnaires. Many of the sociologists were members of two or more of the above subgroups.

Reminder cards were mailed to non-respondents on August 19. As of September 28, 315 usable questionnaires had been returned in the postage paid envelopes. The response rate at this point in time was 65.8%. (Twenty-four letters were returned due to incorrect addresses.)

Findings

The data in Table 1 show responses of 315 respondents to most of the question items that were included in the study. The questions and response percentages in Part I.A and Part I.B are ranked (separately) according to the mean score of each question. For example, the data under Part I.A., "Ability to clearly conceptualize realistic problems" was ranked first as a needed competency area with a mean of 3.81 (range: 1-4). Almost 83% indicated that this is an essential skill. In contrast, "Counseling individual employees concerning their problems" was ranked last (37th) among those in Part I.A. with a mean of 2.08.

Part I.B. shows the responses to a list of 'Specific Personal Attributes to be Considered as Needed Skills.' "Ability to write concisely" was ranked as the number one competency area in this section with a mean of 3.81. "Understanding financial and accounting matters" was ranked last with a mean of 2.57. Responses to these and other questions can be scanned easily in Table 1. This table provides the main body of findings from the study.

Respondents were also asked to describe briefly other competencies they believe should be given greater emphasis and to share other comments and suggestions. One hundred and sixty-seven (66%) of the respondents added at least one suggestion or comment. The average number of different comments volunteered was 3.5. Many respondents wrote a whole page of suggestions many of which are most enlightening. (The gist of their remarks is presented in the summary section of this report.) This high rate of remarks, volunteered after reading a two page cover letter and completing a six page questionnaire, is evidence that the interest in identifying non-research competencies is quite strong.

Overall respondents expressed the need to include many of the competencies in undergraduate and graduate curricula that were identified in Part I. (From pretests, we expected the results to be skewed toward showing many of the competencies as being much needed.) Respondents were ask to indicate by academic levels how much emphasis should be given to the competencies they had circled as "much needed" or "essential". (See Part I.E.) Note that the vast majority of respondents indicated that overall the competencies should receive moderate to great emphasis at the undergraduate level and (mostly) great emphasis at the master and doctorate levels.

About 66% of the respondents perceived that a new textbook is needed that addresses and illustrates many of the most needed competencies shown in Part I. About 26% were not sure a new text is needed and 8% believe no new text is needed. (See Part I.F.) Many respondents wrote notes in the margins explaining their responses. (For example, a number of "not sure's" wrote, "I'm not

very familiar with the literature in this area.) Preliminary analysis into factors related to the textbook question indicates that those who did not feel a text is needed were primarily those more directly involved in research careers who had had little experience in teaching social organization or in consulting on non-research projects. Expressing a need for a new text is rather strongly related ($r = .44$, $p = .001$) to an index (named "ICOMP") created to reflect the total scores of each respondent for Part I.A. The relationship between believing there is a need for a text and an index (named IPERS) created to reflect the total scores in Part I.B. is considerably weaker ($r = .18$, $p = .01$). Respondents who had been in non-academic careers longer perceived less need for a new text. Length employed in academia is not related to perceptions of a textbook need.

In Part II.D., respondents indicated the extent to which they were involved in various teaching and research activities. Further analyses show that only greater involvement in teaching applied or clinical courses and consulting in non-research projects were significantly but not strongly related to ICOMP.

Summary

The findings from this study strongly support the respondents' perceptions that much emphasis should be placed on teaching applied and clinical majors those competencies that were highly rated. Not all sociology majors want to become researchers but most are concerned about having marketable skills upon graduation. The findings suggest that sociology departments that have not included many of the more "essential" skills shown in Table 1 into their curriculum should seriously consider plans to incorporate them, especially at the graduate level. An important qualification is that there must be faculty within the department or adjunct faculty in the community that are willing and able to teach these competencies, or are willing to learn to teach them.

Several suggestions concerning the curriculum were particularly emphasized via open-ended comments. The need for more experiential opportunities for sociology majors (for example, internships, the use of classroom speakers and/or adjuncts from the community) was stressed by 46 respondents...more comments than on any other topic. More than 42 of the respondents wrote comments related to the need for better communication skills (concise writing, speaking, listening, and presentation skills). Also stressed was the need for some knowledge of other disciplines (especially finance, accounting, and economics) and the ability to understand and work with other professionals. Other frequent comments concerned competence in decision making processes, the practice in conceptualization of problems and problem solving techniques. Many of the personal attributes in Part I.B were also stressed. A number of respondents elaborated on the need for excellence in social research skills even though this study was not directed toward this important area. In general the comments were very supportive of the findings in Table 2. These suggestions and others made by the respondents are important; their comments and sugggestions will be discussed more fully in the final report.

TABLE 1. RATINGS FROM 315 RESPONDENTS RANKED BY MEAN SCORES

IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES TO PREPARE SOCIOLOGY MAJORS FOR NON-ACADEMIC CAREERS

Below are many specific competency areas that have been suggested and/or actually have been used by some departments as part of their curriculum. Please circle the response number that best indicates your perception of the extent to which each specific competency is or is not needed to prepare our majors for careers in applied or clinical sociology. (Please keep in mind that research related competencies, though very important, are not addressed in this study.)

PART I*: Rank: A. SPECIFIC FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES:	Relative Need of Each Competency Area (Percentages) NOT NEEDED	SOMEWHAT NEEDED	MUCH NEEDED	ESSENTIAL SKILL	# NOT SURE	MEAN
1. Ability to clearly conceptualize realistic problems	00.6	01.3	14.1	84.0	1	3.81
2. Ability to communicate effectively in work situations	00.0	02.9	21.3	75.8	0	3.73
3. Skills in writing manuals/reports	00.0	07.7	25.4	66.9	0	3.52
4. Competence in setting goals/objectives	01.0	07.4	40.4	51.3	1	3.42
5. Ability to use various problem-solving techniques	01.0	10.0	36.3	52.7	8	3.41
6. Ability to plan organizational projects	00.3	12.3	33.5	53.9	3	3.41
7. Evaluation of projects/programs	00.3	14.6	43.0	42.0	0	3.24
8. Developing team work skills among work group members	01.9	16.6	49.7	31.8	3	3.11
9. Designing new projects/programs	01.3	19.2	46.9	32.6	5	3.11
10. Analytical abilities concerning formal and informal structure of organizations	02.6	21.1	40.1	36.2	6	3.10
11. Ability to work with personnel from other organizations	01.0	21.8	45.6	31.6	2	3.08
12. Effective group leadership skills	00.6	23.2	46.1	30.0	3	3.06
13. Ability to communicate the organization's message to relevant publics	05.6	20.9	36.5	36.9	5	3.05
14. Analytical abilities concerning communication systems used by work organizations	02.3	22.5	46.3	28.9	11	3.02
15. Ability to interface with computer technicians	02.6	24.8	44.3	28.3	1	2.98
16. Skill in applying theory to case studies for practice in problem conceptualization	05.9	28.5	32.1	33.4	3	2.93

*Findings based on 276 or more responses.

PART I: Relative Need of Each Competency Area A. SPECIFIC FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES: Rank:	NOT NEEDED	SOMEWHAT NEEDED	MUCH NEEDED	ESSENTIAL SKILL	# NOT SURE	MEAN
	(Percentages)					
17. Competence in the use of major computer package programs (SPSS, SAS, etc.)	04.6	28.9	37.8	28.6	5	2.91
18. Grant Writing competence	08.0	26.2	32.9	32.9	6	2.91
19. Ability to motivate others	03.4	28.9	43.6	24.2	10	2.89
20. Skills in coordinating goals among sub-units	03.3	29.4	47.2	20.1	7	2.84
21. Ability to identify and amelioriate human relations problems	03.0	37.8	36.1	23.1	5	2.79
22. Competence in conflict prevention/management	04.7	36.6	38.6	20.1	9	2.74
23. Effective skills in human resource planning	04.2	37.9	39.6	18.2	20	2.72
24. Skills in developing better human relations among members with different ethnic, racial, and sex orientations	08.5	34.9	33.6	23.1	12	2.71
25. Use of the Social Systems approach in the analysis of organizational problems	12.6	31.1	31.1	25.3	14	2.69
26. Competence in planning agenda for meetings	05.8	41.0	39.7	13.5	2	2.61
27. Competence in diagnosis/ amelioration of human productivity problems	07.3	41.0	38.5	13.2	16	2.58
28. Competence in negotiating employer-employee differences	09.1	45.8	31.3	13.8	8	2.50
29. Leadership in staff development	08.4	46.5	35.4	09.8	10	2.47
30. Ability to prevent/ overcome apathy and burnout among employees	14.3	42.5	30.6	12.6	11	2.42
31. Skills in handling consumer/customer relations	13.0	48.3	28.4	10.3	12	2.36
32. Develop schematic models to analyze sociological & social psychological processes	19.2	40.4	27.1	13.4	15	2.35
33. Competence in community development planning	16.1	44.8	30.1	09.1	19	2.32
34. Computer programming skills	18.1	48.7	21.1	12.2	6	2.29
35. Knowledge of Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action regulations	19.9	49.7	18.2	12.2	13	2.23
36. Ability to identify/use more effective incentive systems	16.7	50.7	27.2	05.4	34	2.14

PART I:	Relative Need of Each Competency Area					
A. SPECIFIC FUNCTIONAL COMPETENCIES: Rank:	NOT NEEDED	SOMEWHAT NEEDED	MUCH NEEDED	ESSENTIAL SKILL	# NOT SURE	MEAN
	(Percentages)					
37. Counseling individual employees concerning their problems	26.3	47.0	18.8	07.9	9	2.08
B. SPECIFIC PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES TO BE CONSIDERED AS BEING NEEDED SKILLS Rank:						
1. Ability to write concisely	00.0	01.3	18.0	80.7	0	3.79
2. Competence in organizing thoughts/information	00.0	01.0	21.0	78.0	0	3.77
3. Effective listening skills	00.3	01.3	25.1	73.3	0	3.71
4. Self-motivation concerning job responsibilities	00.3	02.9	25.3	71.4	0	3.68
5. Effective speaking skills	00.0	02.3	33.8	64.0	0	3.62
6. Self-confidence in own abilities	00.0	02.9	35.8	61.3	0	3.58
7. High performance standards	00.3	08.3	40.9	50.5	3	3.42
8. Ability to work under pressure	00.0	11.7	40.7	47.6	2	3.36
9. Time management skills	00.3	11.0	46.1	42.5	0	3.31
10. Ability to adapt to organizational goals	03.0	19.2	47.8	30.0	9	3.05
11. Effective skills of persuasion	00.7	29.8	49.0	20.5	3	2.89
12. Importance of cost-effectiveness to the organization	02.4	37.1	42.5	18.0	10	2.76
13. Understanding financial & accounting matters	06.3	44.7	35.1	13.9	8	2.57

E. Please check your opinion as to how much emphasis should be given to those competencies in PART I that you have indicated as being "Much Needed" or "Essential", according to students' academic levels.

EMPHASIS GIVEN:	UNDER-GRADUATE	MASTERS LEVEL	DOCTORATE LEVEL
1. None or Minimum	(19.2)	(4.4)	(12.0)
2. Moderate	(56.1)	(35.7)	(25.2)
3. Great	(24.7)	(59.9)	(62.8)
Mean:	2.05	2.56	2.51
"N" :	255	252	250

F. Do you believe there is a need for a new textbook that addresses and illustrates many of the competencies you have indicated as being "Much Needed" or "Essential" with respect to preparing our majors for careers as applied or clinical sociologists?

1. (8.1) No
2. (26.1) Not Sure
3. (65.8) Yes

Mean: 2.58
"N" : 295

Part II. In order to analyze in an aggregate format the perceptions of all the respondents according to relevant factors, we would appreciate your providing the following information.

A. Please indicate approximately how many years of experience you have had in each of the types of employment described below:

	Median
1. Employed part or full time in academia..... (Years:	9.63)
2. Employed by non-academic organization(s)..... (Years:	6.98)

C. In what year did you receive your highest degree?.... (Year: 1970)
"N": 296+

D. Now, please indicate the extent to which you are involved (or have been involved) in each of the following types of courses or activities:*

	NONE	SOME	MUCH	VERY MUCH	MEAN
1. Teaching research courses	(36.4)	(36.4)	(11.3)	(15.9)	1.07
2. Teaching social organization	(44.9)	(28.6)	(15.9)	(10.6)	.92
3. Teaching social theory	(54.2)	(31.6)	(8.3)	(6.0)	.66
4. Teaching social psychology	(57.1)	(23.6)	(10.0)	(9.3)	.71
5. Teaching applied/clinical courses	(53.5)	(23.9)	(11.3)	(11.3)	.80
6. Teaching social work or agency work	(81.6)	(10.9)	(3.4)	(4.1)	.30
7. Consultant as a researcher	(15.4)	(39.1)	(16.4)	(29.1)	1.59
8. Consultant in non-research projects	(21.2)	(39.4)	(18.5)	(20.9)	1.39

*Findings based on 293 or more responses.

E. If you are now employed in academia, please estimate the approximate number of sociology majors currently enrolled at each the levels below:

Median	
1. (83)	Undergraduates
2. (19)	Masters Level
3. (21)	Doctorate Level

SAMPLING DESIGN AND RESPONSE RATE

As of September 25, 1984, 315 usable questionnaires were returned out of the 479 that were mailed to correct addresses; this is a response rate of 65.8%. (Of the 503 questionnaires originally mailed, 24 were returned due to incorrect addresses.) Follow-up cards were mailed to non-respondents on August 19. See Table 2.

TABLE 2. QUESTIONNAIRE RETURN RATE

Sub-Sample Name	Sub-Population	Sampling Ratio	Original Sample Size	Omitted Duplication with Population	Final Sample Size	Usable Responses	Response Rate
Sociological Practice (SP)	358	1:3	119	_	119	78	65.5%
Clinical Sociology Association (CSA)	424	1:4	106	23	83	56	67.5%
Society for Applied Sociology (SAS)	278	1:3	93	18	75	52	69.3%
Graduate Programs in Applied Sociology (GPS)	92	1:1	92	14	78	45	57.7%
ASA Members Willing to Help (ASAM)	518	1:33	157	9	148	84	56.8%
	1670		567	64	503	315	
Less 24 returned with incorrect addresses:					-24		
Corrected Final Sample					479	315	65.8%